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SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS: MINORITIES

Written statement* submitted by All For Reparation and Emancipation (AFRE), a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[14 January 2002]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s)

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ENG

1. The United Nations has not, as yet, recognized us: we who are the African American peoples or nations in North, Central and South America and the Diaspora. Four hundred years of plantation slavery and its lingering effects have left us deprived of and denied our mother tongue and thus outside a definite place within the UN system. For the past six years, on behalf of the African American people in the United States, Mr. Silis Muhammad has traveled to the UN at Geneva to deliver numerous prayers for recognition and restoration. He has asked that the UN to find or make a category in which we, the African American, will fit; for at present, we have no collective human rights.

2. In the Americas Region and throughout the Diaspora we, who are the descendants of slaves, are filled with dissatisfaction, and many of us do not know its source. The African American people in the United States are perhaps the first to recognize the source of our pain and the gravity of our situation. We know that we have been forcibly cut off, severed from our original identity: our mother tongue, religion and culture: those very things that give life to peoples. We have been as "dead" for 400 years. Today we are experiencing, in reality, the process of ethnogenesis: a word that describes the coming to life again of a people who have been scattered, forcibly cut off, severed; now seemingly assimilated, within the country of our domicile.

3. We have cried out in many ways over many years for the restoration of our dignity as a people. Yet the U.S. Government and other nations commit, daily, the international wrongful act of denying our existence while claiming respect for human rights. It is our desire to reconstitute ourselves and reconstruct our lost ties, with UN assistance. It is also our desire to receive reparations from the U.S. Government for the ongoing loss of our mother tongue and our internationally recognized political identity.

4. We recognize that the United Nations has made some attempts to assist us. In 1997 the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights passed a resolution, #E/CN.4/SUB.2/RES/1997/5, in which the Sub-Commission called upon the Working Group on Minorities to consider how the Sub-Commission in its future work might usefully address the continuing legal, political and economic legacies of the African slave trade, as experienced by Black communities throughout the Americas. In 1998 the Sub-Commission again passed a resolution, #E/CN.4/SUB.2/RES/1998/24, in which the Sub-Commission urged the Working Group on Minorities to include on its agenda an item on issues related to the legacies of the slave trade on the Black communities throughout the Americas.

5. The Working Group on Minorities is aware that we, the African American people, do not fit into a category within the UN system due to the immoral slavery and its illegal lingering effects: especially the deliberate acts of the U.S. Government. In 1998 the Working Group assigned Mr. Jose Bengoa to write a working paper on the existence and recognition of minorities. In the year 2000 this working paper, #E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2000/WP.2, was presented to the Working Group on Minorities, and accepted by the group. In the paper Mr. Bengoa demonstrated an astute understanding of the ethnogenesis of African Americans. Regrettably this distinguished paper has not been selected for presentation on the Sub-Commission floor.

6. To date, the Sub-Commission has not invited the Working Group on Minorities to report specifically on the work and study that it has been engaged in regarding African Americans. Consequently, the Sub-Commission has not addressed the continuing legal, political and economic

legacies of the African slave trade as it had in 1997 indicated a desire to do. While we appreciate and highly value the efforts of the Working Group on Minorities on our behalf, we believe that little progress can be made in our recognition and restoration without the continued interest of the Sub-Commission.

7. Therefore we urgently recommend that the Commission on Human Rights pass a resolution requesting that the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights place African Americans on its agenda, alongside Indigenous Peoples and Minorities. Placement on the agenda of the Sub-Commission would be a welcome first step in official UN recognition of the African Americans.

8. As the World Conference Against Racism demonstrated to the world, African Americans in the Americas Region and the Diaspora are united in a mass call for reparations. In response to the mass call for reparations, the World Conference, in it's Program of Action, made a request of the Commission on Human Rights as follows: "7. Requests the Commission on Human Rights to consider establishing a working group or other mechanism of the United Nations to study the problems of racial discrimination faced by people of African descent living in the African Diaspora and make proposals for the elimination of racial discrimination against people of African descent."

9. The World Conference Against Racism, in paragraph 14 of its Declaration, recognizes that for African Americans, racial discrimination is a consequence of slavery. Thus we would welcome a working group or other mechanism of the Commission on Human Rights if the mechanism has as its primary focus the lingering effects of slavery, and the restoration of our people. In particular, we would request that the proposed working group or other mechanism focus upon the establishment of category in which the UN and world community can recognize African Americans collectively and provide for reparations and restoration of the human rights of the African American people. We would also urge the Commission on Human Rights to take advantage of the work that has already been accomplished by the Working Group on Minorities on behalf of African Americans, and in particular the scholarship of Mr. Jose Bengoa.

10. In our view, and in the view of the organizations and leaders that support us, the dissatisfaction of our people will not be addressed with solutions that are ultimately superficial. The United Nations, and the national governments that have authority over us, cannot repair the damage done by slavery with reparations such as development money, affirmative action or anti-discrimination laws alone. We have lost our original identity and we have been forced to assume the identity of our slave masters. One man cannot live in another mans "skin." It is against nature, and inhumane. Our dissatisfaction will increase until our ethnogenesis is recognized and our human rights are restored.

11. At the World Conference Against Racism the U.S. Government turned its back and walked out on our cries with the same disdain that it has shown internally toward our cries for 400 years. Today we turn to the Commission on Human Rights and the world community with increasing urgency. We fear that if our prayer for UN recognition of our existence is not heard, and if restoration does not take place, we will not be able to hold back a flood of anger that the world only glimpsed in Durban, South Africa.